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The Peace Process and the People of Palestine

**An Information Paper
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Background

Soon after its occupation in 1967, Israel seized absolute control over the West Bank and Gaza's land and natural resources. Since that time, Israel has either confiscated or declared as closed areas over 55% of the West Bank and 22% of the Gaza Strip, thereby placing it out of Palestinian reach. Less than 15% of the total water resources available to Palestinians are permitted for them to use. Israel has continued to expand its civilians colonies and their infrastructure on illegally confiscated Palestinian (mainly agricultural) land, further degrading the Palestinian environment. Furthermore, a devastated Palestinian economy is still controlled largely by Israel, as is access to medical facilities and educational institutions.

To revert this unjust situation, the Palestinian people, by and large, accepted the discourse of peaceful negotiations based on the grounds outlined in the Madrid Conference of 1991. The guiding principles of these negotiations were 'Land for Peace' and the United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338.

Likewise, the Oslo II Interim Agreement was accepted by the Palestinian Authority as an interim step towards the establishment of a Palestinian state. It is interim in nature and should therefore be applied as such by the concerned parties. That is, "neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations." ¹ Yet, in reality, Israel has and continues to violate and manipulate the Interim Agreement by creating *de facto* realities on the ground which have severely fragmented the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This will not only affect the outcome of the final status negotiations, but will render a future sustainable Palestinian entity unattainable and, more immediately, cause intolerable hardship and suffering.

The ongoing fragmentation of Palestinian land and communities into disconnected cantons combined with the frequent collective punishment of closures, house

¹ Chapter Two, Article 31, Item 7 of **the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip** (Oslo II), Washington, DC, September 28, 1995.



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demolitions, withdrawal of identify cards, and the confiscation of private property will only impose a physically unsustainable and brittle peace.

A lasting peace can only be based on United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338, in which a fully sovereign Palestinian state will be established on the whole stretch of Palestinian land occupied by Israel in 1967, neighboring a secure and independent Israeli state. In this respect, the international community is required to secure such an outcome and only then can the currently stalled peace process will be set back on track. More immediately, the international community is asked to intervene and lift the immediate hardships of the Palestinian people, imposed upon them by means of collective punishment.

Physical Fragmentation of Palestinian Communities

In Palestinian society, which is predominately agricultural, the loss of land is similar to the loss of life. Agriculture contributes approximately 24% to the Palestinian Gross National Product. The **confiscation of land** by Israel has not only led to the loss of income, but has also led to the dissolution of Palestinian agricultural society, its culture, traditions and family systems. It has furthermore, forced Palestinian farmers to convert to become dependent upon day labor inside Israel. Therefore, the fragmentation and loss of land has weakened the Palestinian economy, making it dependent upon Israel.

According to the Oslo II Interim Agreement, the West Bank has been divided into three main areas (Figure 1). This jagged distribution of **Areas A, B, and C** has partitioned the West Bank into isolated cantons of Areas A and B which are physically separated from each other by Area C. Only Area A, less than 2.3% of the total West Bank area, is under the complete control of the Palestinian Authority. Although this arrangement was intended to be temporary, Israeli unilateral expansion and construction of colonies and by-pass roads is transforming it into a near reality

If such a situation is to continue beyond the intended interim period, maintaining the stability and the environmentally sustainable and progressive economy required for an independent Palestinian state will be impossible. This will not only deny the right of Palestinians to self-determination, but also directly contradict **international resolutions**, namely United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338 which are the essence of the peace process begun in Madrid in 1991.

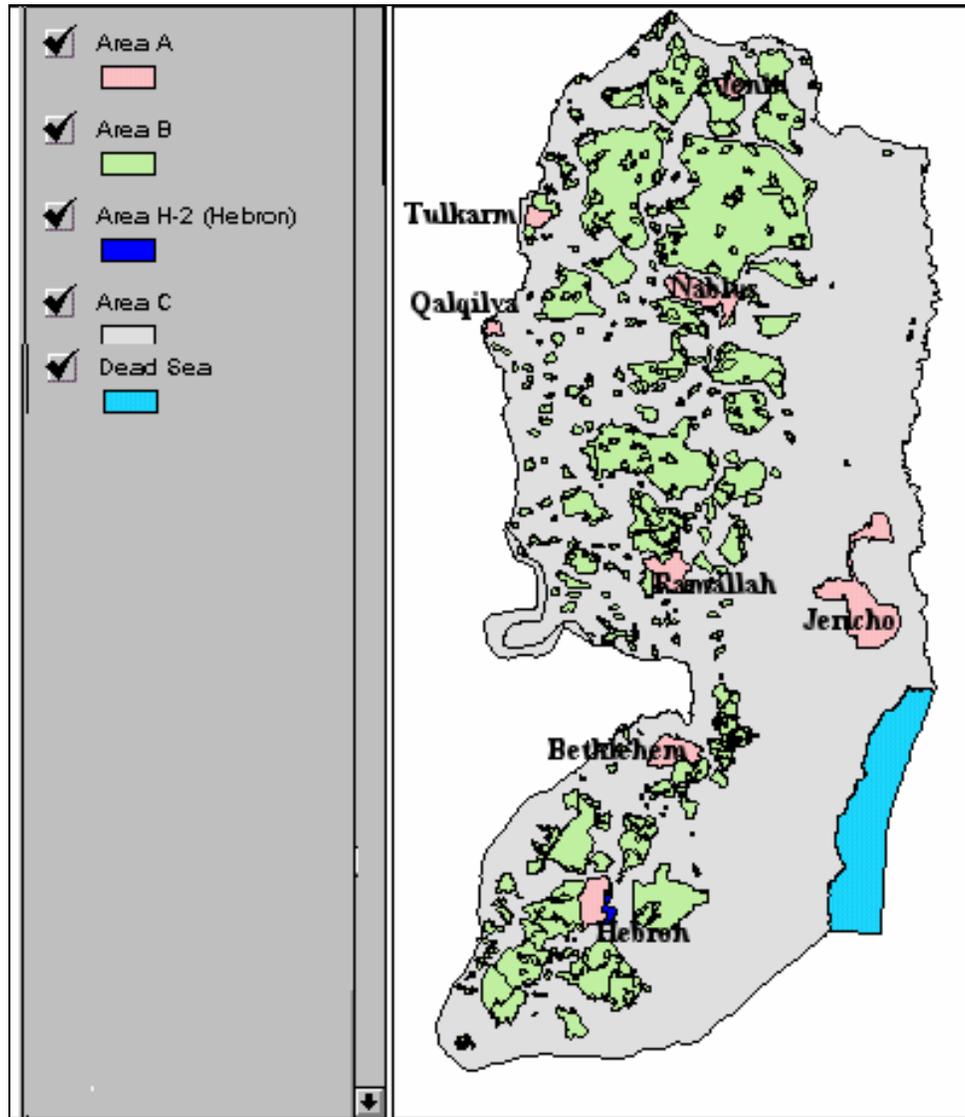


Figure one and 00/100: West Bank Areas A, B, and C

In conjunction with the above described land scheme, Israeli **by-pass roads** further fragment Palestinian communities. A cross examination of the overall geographic extension of both the existing and planned by-pass roads in the West Bank, totaling over 700 km in length, with the various previously prepared plans for the separation lines between Israel and the West Bank uncovers the true nature and actual purpose behind the construction of these roads (Figures 2a and 2b). These are as follows:

- Enabling Israel to divide the West Bank into small **isolated cantons** where geographic unity and integrity is impossible. Therefore, the creation of a Palestinian state on Palestinian land becomes physically unattainable.



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- Creating *de facto* **new physical borders** for the West Bank and isolating uninhabited but Palestinian owned border areas to facilitate their annexation to Israel proper. Thus Israel is using by-pass roads to unilaterally re-draw the geopolitical map of the region, and further deprive Palestinians of areas of their homeland.
- Providing the means to reserve large stretches of Palestinian land for the **expansion of Israeli colonies**. The main clusters of Israeli colonies in the West Bank continue to be surrounded by by-pass roads in a manner which allows the encircling of Palestinian lands where houses have not yet been built. This objective is consistent with the current Israeli Likud government’s political platform which calls for the consolidation and development of Israeli colonies in the West Bank.

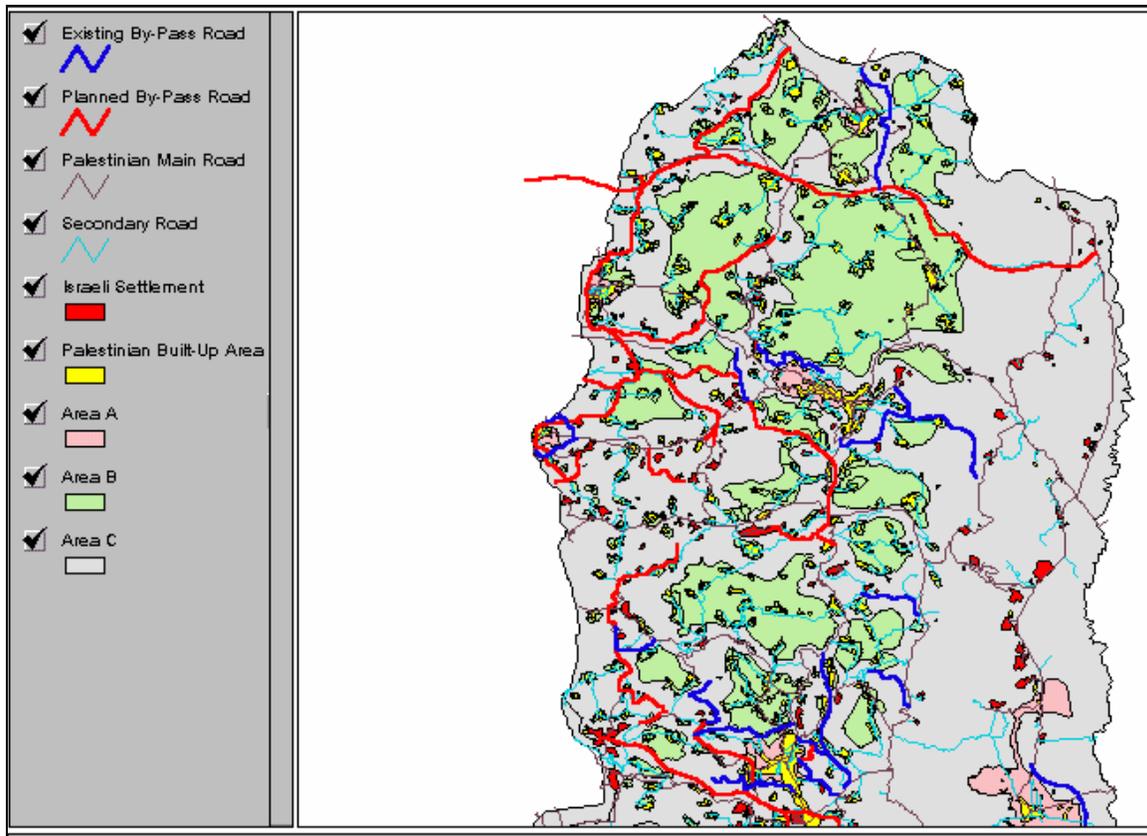


Figure two and 00/100a: The Israeli Bypass Roads in the Northern Part of the West Bank

It is worth mentioning that the by-pass roads so far built in the West Bank exceed 276 kilometers in length while the planned roads are estimated at 452 kilometers. With the safety buffer zone they enjoy, the construction of these by-pass roads requires the confiscation and destruction of approximately **109,200 hectares** of Palestinian land, mostly of which is agricultural. Many farm lands were totally destroyed by the construction of by-pass roads, depriving owners of their main source of income. Other



farm lands were split into several pieces, rendering it impossible to cross from one side of the land to another.

Israeli colonies further fragment Palestinian communities and illegally confiscate much of the remaining land on which these communities can grow and develop. Presently, there are 18 Israeli colonies in the Gaza Strip housing an estimated 4,000 Israeli colonists and

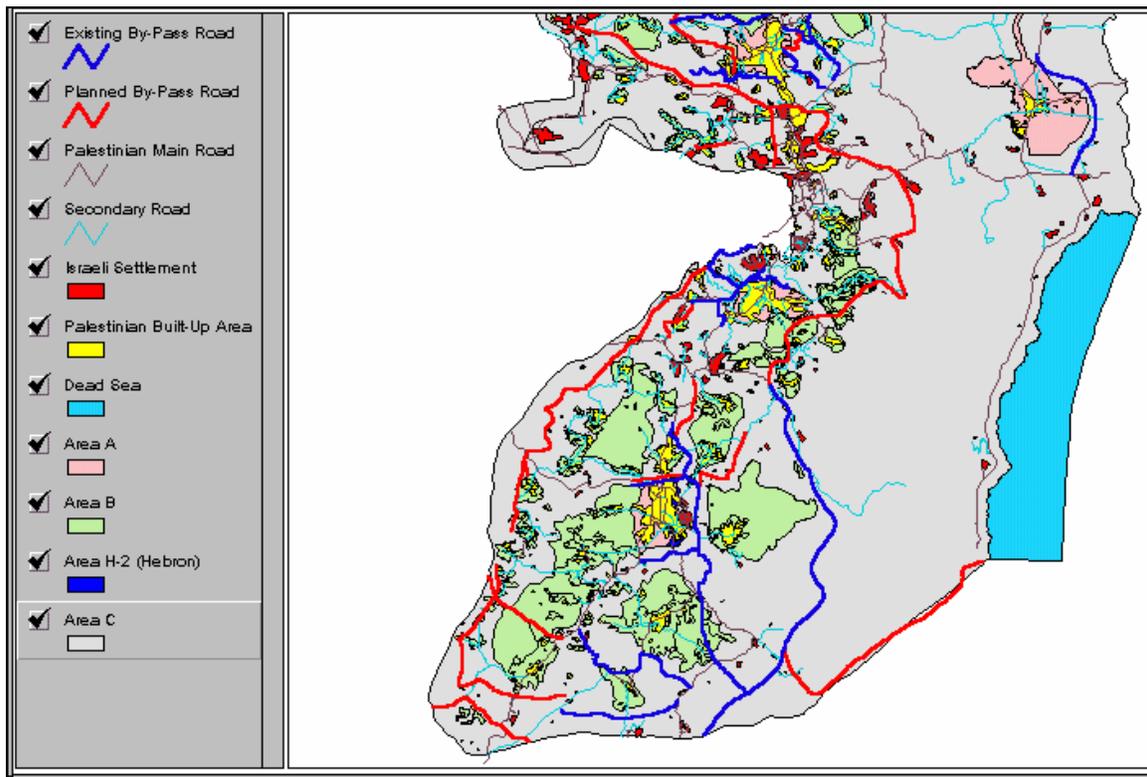


Figure 2b: The Israeli Bypass Roads in the Southern Part of the West Bank

another 270 in the West Bank with a population of approximately 340,000 colonists of whom over 170,000 reside in East Jerusalem. Colonies in the occupied Palestinian territories are environmentally unsustainable, incongruent with indigenous land use and, furthermore, their existence is in direct violation to international laws, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49, item 6, which states that: “The occupying power shall not deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.

The fate of Israeli colonies was not mentioned in the articles of the Oslo II Interim Agreement, rather it was left for the final status negotiations. However, the full



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implementation of the Oslo II Interim Agreement demands that **Israel freeze settlement activities** in the Palestinian territories until further decisions are made.²

Palestinian objection to the existence of Israeli colonies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is not limited to the issue of their illegality. These colonies impose a serious threat to the quality of the **Palestinian environment** and to Palestinian religious and archeological sites. Firstly, most colonies are built on confiscated Palestinian agricultural or grazing lands which has led to the uprooting of thousands of fruit trees and, as a direct result of the drastic reduction in land cover, has increased soil erosion. According to Al-Haq, an estimated 227,661 fruit trees have been uprooted by Israeli soldiers and colonists between 1987 and August 1997.³

Secondly, Israeli colonists in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip consume unsustainable amounts of scarce Palestinian **water resources**. While the average per capita Palestinian water consumption, for all sectors, is 107-156 cubic meters per year, an Israeli colonist uses 640-1,480 cubic meter per year. While Palestinians are often not supplied with enough drinking water during the summer months, Israeli colonists extravagantly fill their swimming pools and water their green lawns.

A crucial, yet often overlooked fact, is that the **geographical distribution** of Israeli colonies in the Palestinian territories severely restricts the growth of Palestinian communities. In most cases, colonies either surround Palestinian communities and, therefore, prevent their natural growth, or they confiscate huge tracts of Palestinian land, ensuring that the land is available for future expansion of colonies.

In sum, colonies are a focal point for land destruction and pollution of the Palestinian environment. Their existence creates a major political dilemma for the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, and their further expansion will not only render Palestinian geographic integrity impossible, but also will adversely affect the environment and **quality of life** today as well as for future generations to come.

The Closure and Restrictions on Movement

In addition to the continuous closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Israel and East Jerusalem since the beginning of the Gulf War in 1991, Israel frequently

² Chapter 2 Article 31, item 7 of the Agreement states that “Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.”

³ Al-Quds Newspaper, *Over Two Hundred Thousand Fruit-Bearing Trees Uprooted by The Israeli Occupation in the Last Decade*, Jerusalem, 29 August 1997



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imposes **internal closures** on these areas. During times of internal closure, Palestinians are not allowed to enter Area C. Thus, movement between most Palestinian communities is forbidden. Also, during these times those approximately 51,000 Palestinian laborers and the few other Palestinians who hold permission to work or visit Israel and East Jerusalem are not allowed to travel for any reason.

In the past and especially during 1997, internal closures were combined with the sealing of **international ports** of entry to and from the occupied territories. Goods and supplies, including medical supplies, were also subject to this comprehensive travel ban. On a micro-level, this has translated into critical shortages of fresh produce, dairy products, medicine, fuel and other basic staples. Likewise, Palestinians are not guaranteed unobstructed access to medical care, schools and universities and places of worship, located mainly in the sealed urban areas.

Around 33,000 students and 15,000 teachers have been denied access to universities and other **institutions of higher learning**. For example, Bethlehem University reported on 27 August 1997 that 70% of its students and 30% of its staff who reside outside of Bethlehem's Area A were unable to reach the university due to internal closures. During such times, all academic and cultural activities are brought to a standstill.

In September 1997 when Palestinians were enduring a particularly long internal closure, 50% of the **medical supplies** in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been depleted. Human rights organizations reported many cases of Israeli soldiers delaying or not permitting the passage of critical medical cases to the appropriate hospitals. This resulted in the death of many Palestinians the denial of necessary treatment for kidney failure, heart attacks, complicated deliveries and other cases.

Each day of total closure results in a loss of US \$1.35 million in household income and a loss of US \$1.5 million in direct export revenue. During the most recent closure in 1997, the budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority increased dramatically from US \$52 to US \$300 million. The accumulated Palestinian losses for the month of August 1997 totaled US \$258 million. The **economy** of the occupied territories is still in disarray and unemployment peaks as high as 60-80%. And the tourism industry, especially in the Bethlehem district, reaches a virtual standstill.



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House Demolitions

During total closures and times of regional crisis such as the recent US standoff with Iraq, Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes increase dramatically. 48 houses were demolished during the last total closure and ??? houses were demolished since world attention re-focussed on the situation in Iraq. Although currently accelerated, this policy has been enforced since 1968. For example, between 1992 and 1995, approximately 539 Palestinian houses were demolished in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The list of impending Palestinian houses slated for demolition presently **exceeds 3,400**.

This is a **human tragedy** with grave political and environmental consequences. The policy of house demolitions is not directly related to the lack of building permits as Israeli authorities often claim, rather it fulfills the Israeli designed Allon Plus Plan which was devised by the Israeli Inner Ministerial Cabinet (Figure 3).

According to this plan, Israel will retain under its control over 55% of the West Bank and return to the Palestinian only 45% of their land. The implementation of **Allon Plus Plan** will bring a catastrophe to the Palestinian people and seriously threaten their existence. According to Allon Plus plan, the 45% of the West Bank land which will be returned to the Palestinian Authority not only deprives Palestinians of most of their agricultural and natural grazing lands, it fragments Palestine into 9 disconnected entities. It also deprives Palestinians the Eastern Slopes and the fertile and water-rich Jordan Valley and border areas.

The implementation of this plan requires the eviction and demolition of thousands of Palestinian houses in the West Bank in order to empty the land of its native inhabitants. This measure, which is presently in process, is creating a **new wave of Palestinian refugees** and uprooted peoples. The Allon Plus Plan will have a detrimental

impact on the sustainability of the development of the Palestinian economic sectors and render the Palestinian aspiration of a Palestinian state an unattainable dream.

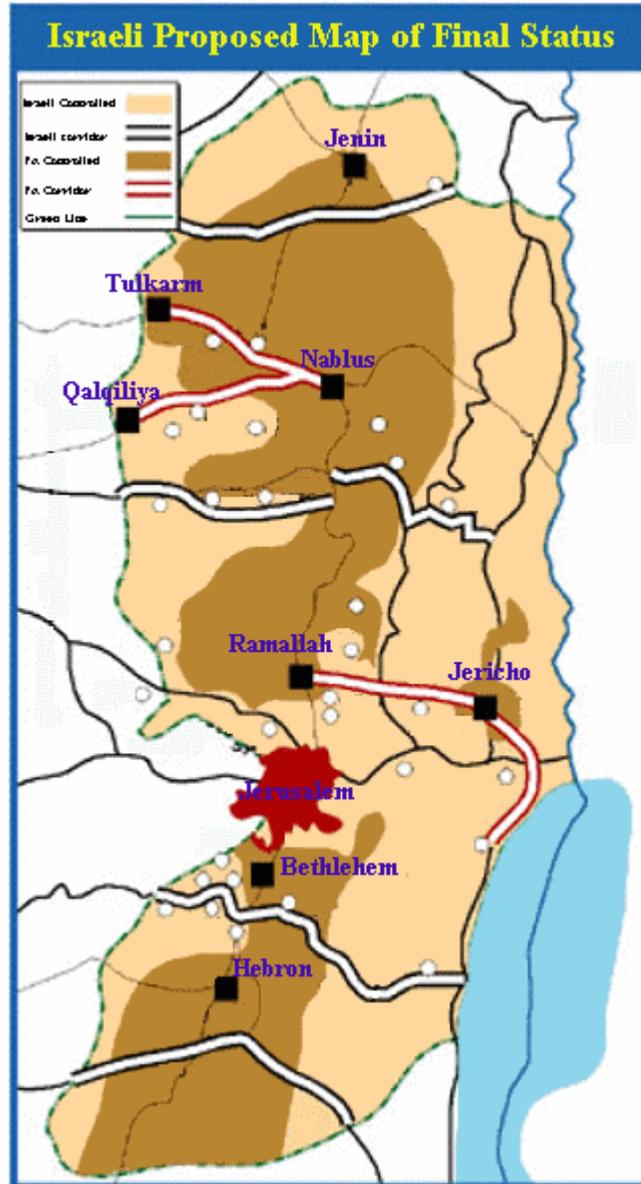


Figure 3: Allon Plus Plan

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a **holy city** for Christians, Muslims and Jews where all faith communities should be guaranteed unrestricted freedom of worship. In addition to serving as a



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spiritual capital, Jerusalem must also serve as the political capital of both the state of Israel and the emerging state of Palestine.

The issue of Jerusalem was postponed until the final status negotiations which have been stalled since their initiation in May 1996. Aspects of Jerusalem to be discussed includes: sovereignty over the city, legal structure, religious freedom, and cultural rights. However, in the meantime, the Israeli government has not stopped its **unilateral practices** in Jerusalem by which it creates *de facto* realities on the ground.

These ***de facto* realities** are clearly affecting the outcome of the negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem, to favor Israel, an action that is in total violation to United Nations' resolutions, particularly 298 and 242, as well as standing Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Agreements. Most recently, the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality approval of the new Jewish colony of E-1 located adjacent to Ma'ale Adumim colony and also the colony in the Ras al-Amoud neighborhood of Jerusalem has created more explosive realities on the ground.

Measures leading to strong demographic shifts have been staged by Israel in order to create an exclusive Jewish population in Jerusalem. De-development strategies have been adopted to restrict expansion of the city's Palestinian communities. In this process, infrastructure and services for this group of residents, by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality, have become inadequate and do not provide a healthy living environment. Overcrowding has become the norm and the pressure on Jerusalem's land and natural resources has been devastating as well. Palestinian houses built without a license have been or are threatened to be demolished by the Israeli government. Presently, **over 2,800 houses in East Jerusalem** alone are slated for demolition by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality.

Confiscation of Identity Cards

To further the Jerusalem Municipality's efforts to **cleanse East Jerusalem** of its Palestinian residents, a policy of canceling the Identity Cards of Palestinian Jerusalemites is in place. This policy has led to the withdrawal of at least 1,074 IDs. It further escalated in 1996 when 689 Palestinians were deprived of their IDs. An additional 358 were confiscated since early 1997. Moreover the Israeli Ministry of Interior has declined to register approximately 10,000 Palestinian infants from Jerusalem in their parents identity cards.

This policy has been applied to West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as to East Jerusalem. To date, approximately 92,000 Palestinians have lost their IDs and, consequently, the **right of return** to their homeland.



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Violations of the Interim Agreement

The Israeli violations of the Oslo II Interim Agreement are numerous. They start with the indefinite **delay of ‘re-deployment’** of Israeli troops from the occupied Palestinian territories, the opening of the Palestinian airport in Gaza, the seaport in the Gaza City, the release of political prisoners, and many others. Other violations are related to the changing of map of Palestine through land confiscation, demolition of houses, and building of colonies. One of the peculiar violations, however, is the unjustifiable delay in the construction of “safe passage” between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This issue has directly impacted the economies of both the West Bank and Gaza Strip and made them vulnerable to the Israeli hegemony, as no physical connection lies between these two geographic entities; one must pass through Israel. The delay of the **safe passage** is in direct violation to Annex I, Article X of the Oslo II Interim agreement which states that “Israel will ensure safe passage for persons and transportation during daylight hours (from sunrise to sunset) or as otherwise agreed by the Joint Steering Committee (JSC), but in any event not less that 10 hours a day”.

The lack of a safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel intends to break the geographic integrity of these two entities of Palestine. The Israeli control over the passage between these complimentary geographic entities of Palestine has been used by Israel as a tool of **economic sanction** against the Palestinians. It furthermore prevents freedom of travel to educational institutions and places of worship.

The Case of Bethlehem

On 28 June 1967 extensive tracts of land from the Bethlehem district were annexed into the Jerusalem municipality by Israel. Approximately 16,000 dunums (16 km²) of land from the tri-city area of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour were confiscated by Israel and thereby rendered them unavailable for the use of its owners. This **annexation** has drastically restricted future expansion and development of the area and its communities.

More recently, the tri-city area has been hit hard by the designation of Areas A, B, and C and by internal closures. Bethlehem’s Area A is the smallest among of all the three cities in the West Bank with a land area of approximately 18 km². As it contains very little agricultural land, most of its residents depend upon jobs inside Israel or on the tourism sector for employment. During times of strict closure, the **unemployment** rate sky-



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rockets to around 80% as Bethlehemites are denied entry into Jerusalem and tourists are denied entry into Bethlehem. This severe blow to the Bethlehem economy has detrimental effects on family and community life. Due to this hardship, many families have emigrated and, in addition, many potential Palestinian returnees and investors have decided not to return.

The ability of Bethlehem to absorb its natural population growth declined dramatically after the 1967 annexation of 16,000 dunums of its land and even further after massive Israeli confiscation of land and the building of **by-pass roads and colonies** (Figure 4). Whereas, the nascent Har Homa colony will draw the northern boundary of the Bethlehem area, the Gush Etzion bloc of colonies limits Bethlehem's southern expanse. From the west, Bethlehem is surrounded by Bitar colony, as well as two by-pass roads. From the east by Taqoa colony and a by-pass road. The building of Har Homa and the fenced military by-pass road which will connect it with the neighboring Gilo colony will deprive Bethlehem of the only land left for its future development.

Construction on Har Homa colony began in March 1997 and has continued uninterrupted since. Not only has construction commenced in violation to international laws, but it also threatens the Christian archaeological sites located on Mount Abu Ghnam and places them under the control of Israeli Jewish colonizers.

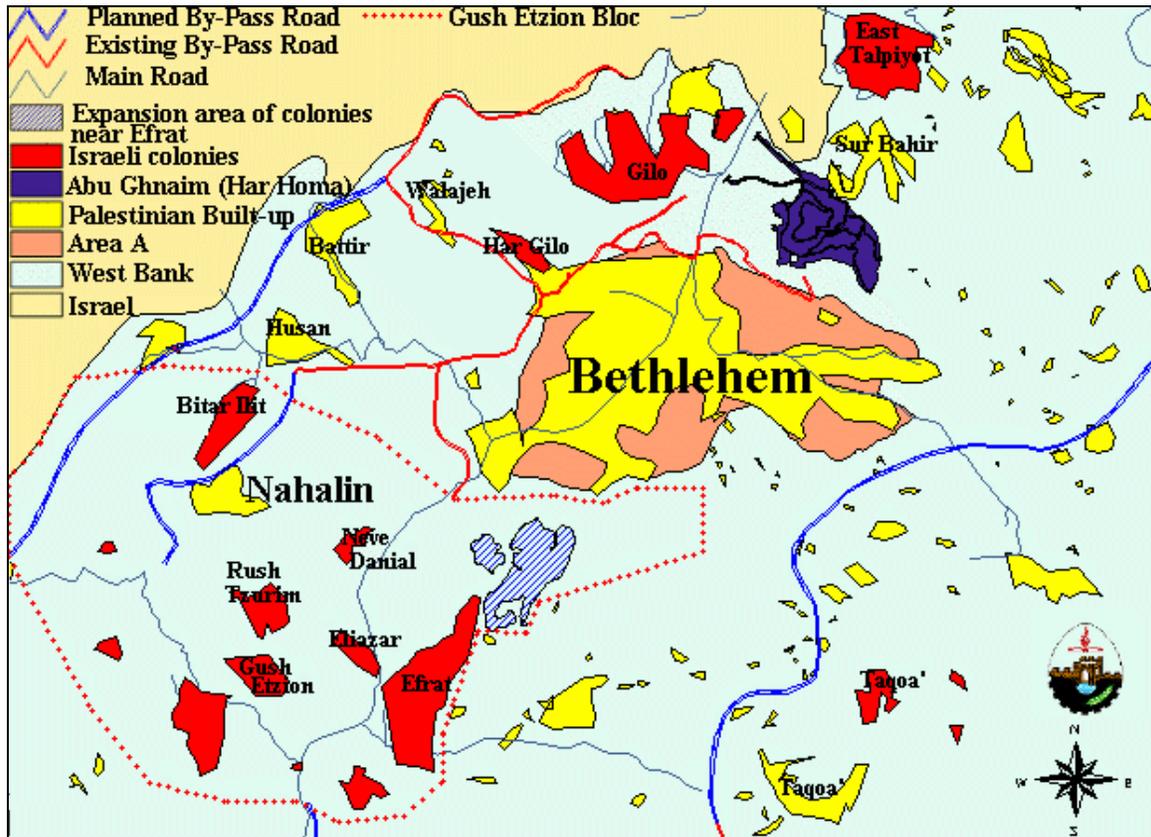


Figure 4: The Strangulation of the Bethlehem Area

The Har Homa colony will ensure that Israel deprives Bethlehemites of their main source of income: **tourism**. The project includes the building of a tourist village to attract tourists who come to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. To this end, Israel is working hard to complete the settlement before the year 2000. Thus, Israel, rather than the local Palestinian community would benefit from the potential development of the tourism sector. It is worth mentioning here that the Paris Economic Protocol between Israel and the Palestinian Authority stipulates that both sides should allow free movement of tourist buses and vehicles between the two sides.

Further devastating to Bethlehem is the fact that large portions of the community lie **outside of Area A**. Thus, many neighborhoods in a town or village are physically separated from the core part of their communities. In times of a closure, children of these neighborhoods are not allowed to reach their schools, sick people are denied access to hospitals, and visiting relatives or friends are impossible⁴. For example, several neighborhoods in the towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala are excluded from Area A and classified as Area C. The Mayor of Beit Sahour, who happens to live in one of these

⁴ *Al-Hiyat Newspaper, 245 Villages are Deprived from Health Services*, Friday, 15 March, 1996, pg. 4, Ramallah, Palestine.



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excluded neighborhoods, is denied access to the municipality and therefore to adequately serve his community during the harsh times of Israeli closure. Also, Talita Kumi Secondary School, one of the most prominent and largest schools serving the Bethlehem area, is located in Area C. On several occasions since the signing of Oslo II, Talita Kumi's over one thousand students were not allowed to reach their school.

What it Takes for a Lasting Peace

The major challenges in Palestine at this stage are not a direct result of the content of the Oslo II Interim Agreement. Rather, they are a result of Israeli non-compliance with and partial implementation of the Agreement itself. A renewed commitment by Israel to the full and immediate implementation of the Agreement is absolutely necessary to restore Palestine's geographical integrity. By halting the confiscation of land and the expansion of Israeli colonies, by ceasing further construction of by-pass roads, by eliminating the restrictions on their use by Palestinians, Israel would not only begin to fulfill its obligation to a just and comprehensive settlement, but also demonstrate its foresight and wisdom by safeguarding the sustainable future of Palestine and its peoples.

In order to reach a political environment conducive to a sustainable final status agreement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both parties not only need to implement the terms and spirit of the Oslo II Interim Agreement, they also should maintain a high level of consultation on issues left to final status negotiations such as Jerusalem, water, Israeli colonies, and Palestinian refugees. These requirements are the recipe to a lasting and comprehensive peace process, without which tension will remain in the area and the peace process may fall into real jeopardy. The violation of the above two principles for a lasting peace agreement have, however, become the norm and the Israeli appetite for a genuine peace has disappeared. Unless the international community exerts pressure on Israel to abide with the standing agreements, it will be impossible to put the stalled peace process back on the right track.

In sum, regardless of the titles of the agreements to be signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, these agreements should not violate the terms of the international conventions, such as Fourth Geneva Convention, and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people stated by the many United Nations resolutions, especially 242 and 338. Unless these agreements respect Palestinian rights, they will be unable to deliver a sustainable and lasting peace.